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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women: implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern

Statement submitted by the International Federation of Business and Professional Women, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 26 July 1996.

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The International Federation of Business and Professional Women (IFBPW), an organization in general consultative status, has, since its inception in 1930, worked to empower women educationally, politically and economically in the societies in which they live. Now, operating in 108 countries worldwide, IFBPW has become increasingly aware of the specific problems of violence against women and the barriers they impose to women's enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Remembering that paragraph 125 (d) of the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women sought to raise awareness of the issue of violence against women and to contribute to its elimination, IFBPW has undertaken a partnership project, with its affiliates, identifying key issues, making them known to Governments and agencies, seeking appropriate legislation and encouraging the provision of rehabilitation programmes and support projects.

Recognizing that studies have shown that one learns violence at a very early age, either by being a direct victim or by being exposed to its use, and that if violence is ignored or

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tolerated within the family and society as a whole, children will accept it as a way of life, appropriate authorities are urged to provide formal, specific educational measures for both boys and girls, to teach them that all forms of violence are unacceptable.

Mindful that women in situations of domestic violence are often forced, by family pressure, culturally entrenched attitudes or the lack of financial resources, to return to unsafe relationships, which tends to indicate that in society's eyes domestic violence is not to be taken as seriously as other violent crime, all sectors of society are encouraged vigorously to support campaigns addressing changes in attitude and seeking legal reform, making domestic violence a separate category of crime.

Aware that a woman will, on average, take 33 beatings before making a cry for help and many more beatings to convince her to leave the perpetrator, non-governmental organizations, including IFBPW, have helped set up crisis centres and refuges offering medical and psychological counselling for women and their children. Mindful that in no country do such centres exist in sufficient numbers to deal with the problems, as the Platform for Action had intended (para. 125 (a)), IFBPW stresses the need for national and local governments to consider the provision of adequate facilities and the possibility of attaching them to hospitals and underwriting them for long-term viability, instead of short-term uncertainty.

Concerned that sexual harassment, intimidation and discrimination in the workplace and in public places cause women mental anxiety and physical stress and undermine their self-esteem, and recognizing that they are under-reported for fear of reprisal or loss of job, Governments and employers are urged to recognize the impact that situation has on women's participation and performance within the labour market, to take measures to make it unlawful for any person to demand, request or require any sexual favour from another, and to provide adequate training and monitoring programmes.

Causing increasing alarm is the growth of the illegal business of international trafficking in women and children as commodities for sexual purposes, particularly sexual tourism. Such practices have a number of repercussions. Human dignity and social value are undermined. There is a disintegration of the family and appropriate family values. In many countries the widespread practices of prostitution and related activities disrupt the social fabric and facilitate the spread of AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. Governments are implored to step up their efforts to initiate and support educational and training programmes that will lead to alternative occupations and sources of financial independence for the victims.

Stressing that all forms of violence against women, including the violence of rape, with particular reference to teenage girls in both rural and suburban areas, have a marked effect on the health of women and girls, causing physical or mental damage or disablement and perhaps requiring emergency or long-term health care, IFBPW recommends that urgent consideration be given to the provision of specialist resources, with professionals trained to cope with the impact of emotional, psychological, sexual and physical violence.

In conclusion, IFBPW stresses that tackling the issue of gender violence is not an effort to divide the sexes but, rather, to unite them. Preventing gender violence will improve relationships and the lives of families. Eliminating violence from women's lives will give

them the freedom to participate fully in society, to be financially independent, to be empowered for development and to make a proper contribution to the economies of their countries. Finally, IFBPW believes that the single major factor on which the achievement of these goals rests is a campaign that wins full and total respect for all women everywhere.